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No. 34 Fifteenth Year August 27,1948

First Assembly of the World Council of Churches
Amsterdam, August 22 - September 4,1948

The first Assembly of the World Council of Churches, opened in Amsterdam on August 22, in worship at the Nieuwe Kerk, one of the historic homes of the Reformed Church of Holland.

Nearly a hundred and fifty separate churches, in all the continents and countries, are represented in a fellowship which although riven by important differences has a deep unity at its heart. That unity is expressed partly by a phrase in the World Council's constitution, "a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour", but even more adequately in the fact that the Assembly meets and begins its life today.

Road to Amsterdam

Where does the road begin? Who knows the dare which marks the opening of the track down which the Holy Spirit has been leading the churches? There are no certain answers to these questions to be recorded with the precision which human beings like to have in their diaries, although there are areas of light which have illumined the pathway.

This Assembly, under God, is yet another stage in the developing life of the Christian churches throughout the world; a "coming to Mount Zion" of the new Israel that is the Church. A road, however, that is pathetically marked with monuments of unbelief, uncharitableness and distrust between Christian and Christian, and between the separated churches.

But it is a road also marked with some ribbed and renewed milestones, such as Stockholm 1925, Lausanne 1927, Oxford and Edinburgh 1937, which were passed in faith and courage. These are the immediate

parents of an orgaized World Council of Churches, and each of them was inspired and led by a leader whose memory will be ever green through this Assembly - Nathan Soderblom of Sweden, Charles Brent of the United States and William Temple of Britain.

These men, and many of their colleagues who are present at this Assembly, saw some of the road to Amsterdam, and they hand on to the Assembly a great trust and responsibility not to be statically protected but to be used adventurously. This Assembly is not the end of the road, or even the desired haven of the ecumenical movement. It is the next stage in what may be the discovery of new life for the whole Christian Church.

Each delegate adds his own contribution to the fashioning of the road. Some will have grown up under the discipline and action of the missionary movement and the expanding life of the younger churches of Christendom; others through the fellowship of the world's students and the concerns of Christian education; and many will have learned their first steps in ecumenical affairs in church cooperation in the big cities of America and Europe. While others have come along the road of postwar reconstruction. And each great Church confession builds its life and experience in Christ into the pathway.

Whatever the Christian discipline may be, Amsterdam is the place of meeting. It is not the place of fusion or merger but the start of continuous relations which may be to God's glory.

Holland's Churches

Those who enquire about the relative strength of the Christian churches in Holland will be glad to have these authoritative figures from Dr.Emmen, Secretary of the General Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Church. Netherlands Reformed Church : 3'000'000; Roman Catholic Church 3'000'000; Reformed Churches in the Netherlands : 600'000 (separated from the first, 1886); Christian Reformed Church (separated from the first, 1834) 50'000; Remonstrant Brotherhood (separated from the first 1618) 30'000; Lutheran Brotherhood 50'000; Old Catholic Church 10'000; Mennonites 40'000; Union of Baptist congregations 8'000; Free Evangelical Congregations 7'000.

Opening Service

The opening worship service held Sunday, August 22, at 3 p.m., in the Nieuwe Kerk, was colourful and impressive. Representatives from 150 churches in forty-two nations, dressed in their robes of office, united in the procession. Anglican, Greek, Orthodox, Old Catholic and nearly all the Protestant churches of the world were there. Many came from behind the "Iron Curtain". Dr. Gravemeyer of Holland read the confession of sins, President Marc Boegner and Archbishop Eidem read the liturgy. The speakers were: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of Thyateira, Dr.John R.Mott. Rev.D.T.Niles delivered the sermon. The whole assembly recited the Credo. Archbishop Germanos gave the final benediction.

For his sermon Rev. D.T.Niles preached on the text : "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?" (Ex.III,2).

"Who are we that we should be here at this great gathering of Churches? How is it that this great opportunity and privilege has come to us? Why is it that we, and no one else, are here at this meeting-place with God, to receive from Him the call and the commandment to go unto Pharaoh?

We are here because we have been sent here, and those who chose us did so because they thought of us as, in some ways, important people. ... But surely we shall fail - fail those who have sent us and fail ourselves, fail God and fail the word - if we do not realize at the very outset who and what we truly are!

Moses could boast of many things... - and yet the word he speaks is a word of humiliation, the confession he makes is one of bankruptcy. ... We too must begin at our place of self-revelation, and for us that place is the Cross. It was there that we saw God's inexhaustible resources - His love poured out without being emptied - and it was there that we lost the illusions about ourselves... We are not what others think we are... At the foot of the Cross we all simply fall into one category - that of murderers... His murderers indeed: for the weakness of Nicodemus in the face of unpopularity is our weakness, the lust for power and for profit in Caiaphas is our lust, the treacherous impatience of Judas is our treachery, the unreadiness of Peter at the time of crisis is our unreadiness, the prudence of the Sanhedrin which would sacrifice the one for the many is our prudence, and the helplessness of Pilate because of his unrepented past is our helplessness...

Pharaoh knows Moses.. pharaoh knows the people of Israel...pharaoh knows his own heart... How true a picture of the world to which we are send!... It is a world that refuses to listen to God's Word, and yet is also unable to listen or to understand... But is it to Pharaoh that Moses is sent? Is he not sent rather to the people themselves, while it is God himself who deals with Pharaoh... We announce to it God's great demand, but it is God Himself who must and will deal with the demons of our time. And where the people obey and march forth at God's behest, Pharao's armies cannot follow...

Precisely here, however, lies the source of our anguish. We may go to Pharaoh in the strength of God's promise and His might. But will God act? Will He act in our time? Is the Fall of Pharaoh near? 'Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?'

Christ's answer to us is the same as His answer to those disciples of old : 'It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hash set within His Own authority: ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'

The power you will show is the power of the leaven which I have already hid, the harvest you will reap is the harvest of the seed which I have already sown. The passions you will rouse are the passions of the fire which I have already kindled, the love you will share is the love

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of the deed which I have already done, and the end you will proclaim is the end of the end which I have already accomplished. Henceforth, the Son of Man sits at the right hand of power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven. Therefore shall ye be My witnesses...

We are witnesses to the Negro in the same way as to the White. We are witnesses within the Western Democracies as well as the Eastern Republics. We are witnesses among peoples of all religions and no religion. We are witnesses among the refugee, the displaced person.. unto the uttermost part of the earth."

World Council Established

At the first Plenary Session, on Monday morning, Dr. Samuel Mc Crea Cavert presented a report on the programm of the Assembly. Pastor Boegner presented the resolutions on the constitution of the World Council of Churches and Dr. Visser't Hooft the report of the Provisional Committee.

Dr. Visser't Hooft emphasised the character of the World Council which is to be a Council of Churches, not *the* Council of the one undivided Church."Our name indicates our weakness and our shame before God, for there can be and there *is* finally only one Church of Christ on earth. Our plurality is a deep anomaly. But our name indicates also that we are aware of that situation, that we do not accept it passively, that we would move forward toward the manifestation of the One Holy Church..."

E.P.S.Geneva

Lambeth Conference resolution on the World Council

In the Report of the Lambeth Conference of Archbishops and Bishops of the Anglican Communion, certain Resolutions were adopted by the whole Conference. No.76 reads as follows :

"The Conference cordially welcomes the formation of the World Council of Churches and desires to place on record its deep appreciation of the valuable services already rendered to the cause of christian unity by the officers and members of its Provisional Committee, and sends its good wishes to the Council for its first Assembly at Amsterdam andprays that God may guide and direct all its deliberations.

The Conference hopes that the results of the Assembly at Amsterdam may be made widely known throughout the Anglican Communion, and that an active interest in the World Council of Churches may be encouraged in all dioceses and parishes."

E.P.S.Geneva